Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions of the claims in the present application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Previously Amended) A computer processor implemented method for providing a timestamp for data in a database system, the database system operating in accordance with a database schema, the computer processor performing the following method steps:

providing a table in the database system, the table including a plurality of rows of data;

providing a hidden timestamp column in the table of the database system, the hidden timestamp column including a timestamp value for each row of data in the table, the timestamp value indicating a last time a corresponding row of data in the table was previously modified, wherein the hidden timestamp column does not appear in the database schema by default and exposes the timestamp value for a given row of data in the table only to a query that calls the timestamp column by name;

receiving a query from an application to obtain a timestamp value from the hidden timestamp column, the query calling the timestamp column by name; and

in response to the query, the hidden timestamp column returning the timestamp value to the application for use by the application,

wherein the application uses the returned timestamp value for controlling a locking scheme associated with recording data updates in the database system.

2-25. (Cancelled)

26. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the timestamp value corresponding to a given row of data in the table is automatically updated each time data in the given row has been modified.

27-30. (Cancelled)

31. (New) A computer readable medium with program instructions for providing an automatically updated timestamp for database systems, comprising instructions for:

providing a table in the database system, the table including a plurality of rows of data;

providing a hidden timestamp column in the table of the database system, the hidden timestamp column including a timestamp value for each row of data in the table, the timestamp value indicating a last time a corresponding row of data in the table was previously modified, wherein the hidden timestamp column does not appear in the database schema by default and exposes the timestamp value for a given row of data in the table only to a query that calls the timestamp column by name;

receiving a query from an application to obtain a timestamp value from the hidden timestamp column, the query calling the timestamp column by name; and

in response to the query, the hidden timestamp column returning the timestamp value to the application for use by the application,

wherein the application uses the returned timestamp value for controlling a locking scheme associated with recording data updates in the database system.

32. (New) The medium of claim 31, wherein the timestamp value corresponding to a given row of data in the table is automatically updated each time data in the given row has been modified.

33. (New) A system, comprising:

a database system comprising at least one table, the at least one table including a plurality of rows of data;

an application capable of querying the database system;

a hidden timestamp column in the at least one table in the database system, the hidden timestamp column including a timestamp value for each row of data in the table, the timestamp value indicating a last time a corresponding row of data in the table was previously modified, wherein the hidden timestamp column does not appear in the database schema by default and exposes the timestamp value for a given row of data in the table only to a query that calls the timestamp column by name; and

means for receiving a query from an application to obtain a timestamp value from the hidden timestamp column, the query calling the timestamp column by name;

wherein the application uses the timestamp value for controlling a locking scheme associated with recording data updates in the database system.

34. (New) The system of claim 33, wherein the timestamp value corresponding to a given row of data in the table is automatically updated each time data in the given row has been modified.